

Game with User Selectable Payout Schedules

The present application claims priority from US Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/422,103 filed on 30th October 2002.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to a game including user selectable payout schedules.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

10 In conventional gaming apparatus the amount awarded to a player for being dealt a winning hand is normally determined by a payout schedule. Typically, the player will be awarded a higher amount for betting a greater amount. Further, the amount of the award is typically greater for winning combinations that are rarer or more difficult to obtain, for example a Royal Flush in a Poker game or all the reels of a fruit/slot machine game stopping on the same special high value symbol.

15 In conventional games, there is only one payout schedule which is used throughout the game. In some existing games generally known as "Prospect", manufactured by a number of companies including IGT and Bally, more symbols are bought into play as a player bets greater amounts. This in turn means that greater prizes can be won, but there is still only one payout schedule that is
20 actually used to determine the amount.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of playing a game including steps of:

providing a plurality of payout schedules;

allowing the player to select two or more of the payout schedules irrespective of an amount of any bet he places;

allowing the player to place two or more bets, each said bet being associated with a respective one of the selected schedules, the bets being
5 based on an outcome of a selection of a combination of symbols;

selecting a combination of symbols in an at least apparently random manner;

determining whether the combination of symbols is a winning combination, and

10 awarding the player for a winning combination for each said bet in accordance with its respective selected payout schedule.

Normally, the one or more payout schedules are selected by the player before the symbols are selected, or at least before a step of displaying the combination of symbols to the player. All or some of the plurality of payout
15 schedules may be displayed to the player at least when he is selecting the payout schedule(s). The method allows the player to select how much he wants to bet using each said selected schedule. The method may further include a step of allowing the player to repeat the amount he bet on each said selected schedule for a subsequent selection of combination of symbols.

20 Each said payout schedule typically specifies one or more award amounts for winning combinations of symbols. At least one of the payout schedules may include a plurality of award amounts for at least one of the winning combinations, with the amount to be awarded to the player being dependant upon the amount bet by the player. Typically, the awards are greater

when a greater amount has been bet by the player.

One or more of the payout schedules may specify greater awards for winning combinations of symbols that are at least perceived to be less likely to be selected. One or more of the payout schedules may specify that no award is to be paid out for winning combinations of symbols that are at least perceived to be more likely to be selected.

In some embodiments of the game, the method may further comprise a step of allowing the player to play a sub-game if he selects specific schedules. The sub-game may include steps of:

displaying a sequence for a period of time;
arresting the sequence,
wherein the player wins the sub-game if the sequence is arrested at a specified point or within a target range.

The sequence can be arrested automatically by the machine (e.g. based on an at least apparently random trigger), or the player may have some influence over arresting the sequence.

The difficulty of the sub-game may vary in accordance with the potential value of the payout schedule selected. For example, the speed of the sequence may increase or the target range may be decreased.

If the player loses the sub-game then a penalty such as forfeiting the credits he intended to bet on all or some of the selected schedules is imposed.

The symbols may be representations of (substantially conventional) playing cards. The determination of whether the combination of symbols is a winning combination may be made in accordance with rules of substantially

conventional card games such as Poker. Alternatively, the symbols may be substantially conventional fruit/slot machine symbols.

The step of selecting the payout schedules may include displaying an initial representation of a said schedule and then displaying a fuller representation of the schedule before it is selected to allow the player to view the schedule in more detail before confirming its selection.

The steps of selecting the payout schedules and the amount to be bet on at least some of the selected schedules may be implemented by the player pressing one or more special button.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided gaming apparatus including:

a display including a plurality of payout schedules;

an input device for allowing the player to select two or more of the payout schedules irrespective of an amount of any bet he places;

an input device for allowing the player to place two or more bets, each said bet being associated with a respective one of the selected schedules, the bets being based on an outcome of a selection of a combination of symbols;

a device for selecting a combination of symbols in an at least apparently random manner, and

a device for determining whether the combination of symbols is a winning combination and awarding the player for a winning combination for each said bet in accordance with its respective selected payout schedule.

Whilst the invention has been described above, it extends to any inventive combination of the features set out above or in the following

description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention may be performed in various ways, and, by way of example only, an embodiment thereof will now be described, reference being made to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 illustrates an example screen display that can be produced by an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 illustrates schematically example steps that can be performed during a game;

Figure 3 illustrates an example of a sub-game a player can play after selecting a payout schedule;

Figure 4 illustrates an example screen display that can be produced by an embodiment of the invention, and

Figure 5 illustrates an example screen display showing selectable payout schedules available in another embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the example screen display of Figure 1 a hand of five cards 102, 104, 106, 108, 110 has been dealt to a player in an at least apparently random manner. Although the embodiment described with reference to Figure 1 is an electronic implementation of the game it will be appreciated that the game could be played using conventional playing cards and printed payout schedules, etc. Different ways of implementing the game using electrical or mechanical components also exist. For example, in Figure 1 touch screen buttons are used and at least some of these could be substituted by physical buttons on a game

cabinet. It will also be appreciated that an electronic version of the game can be implemented using a computer network, possibly with the various components being distributed over the network, e.g. the means for selecting schedules and bet amount being present on a user terminal, whilst the card combination component may be located on a server.

The display of Figure 1 further includes five Hold buttons 112, each one of the buttons being associated with a respective one of the five cards 102 - 110. The use and implementation of Hold buttons is well known to those skilled in the art and need not be described herein detail. The display further includes a Bet One button 114. Each time the button 114 is pressed, the amount of credits to be bet by the player on a hand of cards is incremented by one. There is also a Max Bet button 116, which, when selected, immediately bets the maximum amount (e.g. five) of credits on the hand. A Deal/Draw button 118 is also included which the player normally presses after he has placed his bet. Pressing the button 118 results in the symbols on the cards 102 - 110 being selected by the game in at least apparently random manner and the selected symbols are then displayed. It will be understood that the selection of the symbols that are to appear on the five cards can take place at a number of different points in the game when it is implemented electronically. For instance, the symbols could be selected before the player places a bet (whilst a representation of the back faces of the cards are shown onscreen), or the symbols could be selected after the player has pressed the Deal/Draw button 118.

The display further includes a remaining credits information area 120, an

area 122 indicating the amount of credit bet by the player on the hand and an area 123 that is used for indicating an amount awarded to the player where the cards 102 - 110 show a winning combination.

The remaining items in the display of Figure 1 will now be described and reference will be made to the example game play steps of Figure 2 where appropriate. It will be appreciated that the steps of Figure 2 are exemplary only and that some of the steps could be omitted, repeated and/or re-ordered during play of various embodiments of the game.

Three payout schedules 126, 128, 130 are included on the display (displayed at step 2000 of Figure 2). The display further includes a "Select Table" button 124 which can be used by the player (e.g. at step 2002 of Figure 2) to directly select one of the schedules 126, 128, 130. In the example of Figure 1, the first payout schedule 126 is initially selected and may be considered to be the default schedule. When the player first presses the button 124 the second payout schedule 128 is selected and the next time the button 124 is pressed the third payout schedule 130 is selected. Pressing the button 124 again results in the first payout schedule 126 being reselected and this cycling through the schedules can be repeated. The currently selected payout schedule may be highlighted or marked on screen, or their order may be changed, with the payout schedule that is in a particular position being the selected one. In an alternative embodiment not all of the plurality of schedules are displayed at the same time, e.g. only one is included on the display and this changes when the Select Table button 124 is pressed. In another embodiment,

a plurality of buttons may be used to select from a respective plurality of payout schedules.

In the example, the player can select which payout schedule(s) he wants to use and how much he wishes to bet on the selected schedule(s) before each hand is dealt. However, the game could be modified so that he must stick with the selected schedule(s) for a minimum number of games or until he has won/lost a particular number of hands. Thus, the player is able to select more than one of the payout schedules (illustrated by the broken line from step 2004 to step 2004) and select a different amount to be bet on each selected schedule.

The amount the player can win for a winning hand will be the total of those specified in the appropriate row/column of all of the selected payout schedules. In one version of such a game, certain restrictions may be imposed on a player (e.g. he may have to bet the maximum amount) if he wants to be able to select more than one payout schedule.

The player can use the Bet 1 or Max Bet buttons 114, 116 (step 2004 of Figure 2) to indicate the amount of credits he wants to bet on the selected schedules. Thus, the player can bet different amounts on different selected schedules. In the example embodiment of Figure 1 the player can quickly elect to bet the maximum number of credits on all three of the schedules by pressing a Max Bet All Cards button 125 (which automatically selects the 3 schedules). It will be understood that further buttons could be implemented to allow the player to place bets using different combinations of schedules/credits at the press of one or more special buttons.

In some embodiments of the game, a player may have to (or have the

option to) play a sub-game (step 2006 of Figure 2) if he wants to use a payout schedule other than the default one. The sub-game can take many forms and an example is illustrated in Figure 3.

The display in Figure 3 includes six bulbs 3001 – 3006 arranged in a vertical line. The bulbs light up one at a time in sequence from the bottom one 3001 to the top one 3006. In some embodiments, the player can have some (at least perceived) influence over the sub-game (e.g. by pressing a button 3010 to stop the light sequence so that only the currently lit bulb remains on), although more typically the stopping of the sequence will be under the control of the gaming apparatus, e.g. using a pseudo-random value generator to determine whether or not the sequence should be stopped after each step of the sequence. The object of the game is to stop the sequence when a bulb within a target range is lit up. For example, the target range may include the top two bulbs 3005, 3006 and only when the button is pressed when one of these two bulbs is lit will the player win the sub-game. Winning the sub-game allows the player to continue to play the game using the selected schedule(s). If the player loses the sub-game then a penalty such as forfeiting the credits he intended to bet on all or some of the selected schedules is imposed.

The difficulty of the sub-game may depend upon the schedule(s) selected by the player. Typically, the greater the reward offered by the schedule, the more difficult the sub-game. For instance, if the most potentially valuable schedule is selected then the target range may only include one bulb, or the speed of the lighting sequence may be increased.

It will be understood that other types of sub-games could be

implemented. For example, the bulbs or icons could be arranged in a circular, or other shape, and a specific set (e.g. an arc of the circle) of the bulbs could comprise the target range.

Returning to Figure 1, the display further includes a Repeat Bet button 129 that can be used to bet the same number of credits on each selected payout schedule as the player did on the previous deal of cards (if he has sufficient credit) at the touch of one button and this also starts the card dealing.

In certain embodiments of the game, the player can modify all or some of the bets he indicated that he wanted to place. This may be done by pressing the Select Table button 124 to re-select a particular schedule and use the Bet buttons 114, 116 to change the amount to be bet using the currently highlighted schedule. The Bet 1 button 114 can be configured so that it resets the number of credits bet to zero after it has been pressed to increment to the number of credits to the maximum, thereby allowing the player to "cancel" a bet he provisionally placed. After the player is happy with the bet(s) he has placed he can then press the Deal/Draw button 118. The ability to choose how many schedules to use, how much to bet on each selected schedule and the possibility of cancelling a bet he was about to place before the cards are dealt gives the player a greater feeling of control than when playing existing games of a similar nature.

Each of the payout schedules 126, 128, 130 includes five columns and nine rows that contain either a figure or a "-" symbol. Figures in the first to fifth columns correspond to the amounts a player can win if he bets one to five credits, respectively, and if he is dealt the winning hand indicated in the

corresponding row. A "-" symbol indicates that no award will be made for the corresponding bet/winning hand for that payout schedule, e.g. no award is made for a combination of cards known as "Jacks or Better" when the second 128 and/or third 130 payout schedules are selected.

5 The type of hands specified in the upper rows of the schedules are those that are at least perceived to be less likely to be selected, whilst those in the lower rows may be perceived to occur more commonly. Thus, the uppermost winning hand (Royal Flush) may be perceived to be the least likely winning hand to be dealt, whilst the lowest winning hand (Jacks or Better) may be perceived to
10 be the most likely winning hand to be selected by the game. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the probability of each of the winning hands being dealt can be weighted. The probability of a player being dealt a certain winning hand may be predetermined by the gaming apparatus using known methods. In such cases, the symbols on the cards are selected in a
15 pseudo-random manner and the higher value winning combinations (e.g. Royal Flush, Straight Flush) may in fact be less likely to be selected. It will also be appreciated that such an order need not be strictly followed, for example, the likelihood of being dealt a Straight Flush and a Three of a Kind may be the same or the likelihood of being dealt a Three of a Kind may in fact be less than being
20 dealt Two Pairs.

The first payout schedule 126 generally awards smaller amounts for winning combinations of symbols. The second and third payment schedules 128, 130 generally award greater amounts for certain winning combinations that are perceived to be rarer or more difficult to obtain but tend to award smaller (or

zero) amounts for winning combinations that may be more likely to be dealt.

An example of game play will now be given. Suppose the player selected the first payout schedule 126, bet 3 credits and pressing the Deal/Draw button 118 resulted in two of the cards (e.g. 104, 108 in Figure 1) displayed (step 2008 of Figure 2) being Kings. The player would be awarded (step 2010) the number of credits (5) specified in the "Jacks or Better" (because he was dealt a pair of cards having a value greater than Jacks) row for the "Bet Five" column of the first payout schedule 126.

If the player had selected the second payment schedule 128 instead of (or in addition to) schedule 126 then he would not have been awarded any credits for the same hand, whilst the rewards for other hands (e.g. a Royal Flush) are considerably greater. Some players will therefore decide to select the second and/or third payout schedules, and bet various amounts, at least some of the time and are prepared to accept that no award or a lower value award will be made if they are dealt a winning hand that is at least perceived to be more likely to be dealt. This can give the player a feeling of greater control over the amount he can win and prolong interest in the game.

The embodiment of Figure 4 has fifteen payout schedules 201 - 215 instead of three. It will be appreciated that the layout of the schedules shown in just an example and that they could be of different colour, shading, etc and need not be aligned or necessarily contain the same number of rows. Substantially identical game elements are given the same reference numbers as for the embodiment of Figure 1. In the example of Figure 1 each of the three payout schedules showed the values of each winning combination for a bet of 1 to 5

credits. As the version shown in Figure 4 has many more payout schedules a similar display could be somewhat cluttered and so each of the schedules 201 - 215 includes a Schedule Bet heading that indicates the number of credits that have been bet on that particular schedule. For example, the Schedule Bet heading 201A for schedule 201 indicates that 3 credits have been bet on that schedule. Initially, all the Schedule Bet values may be set as 0, apart from the heading 201A, which can be set as 1.

The display of Figure 4 further includes a See Pays button 216. When this button is selected, the display of Figure 5 becomes visible (usually by replacing the display of Figure 4). As noted above, the full version of the payout schedules giving the award amount for each winning combination depending on whether the player has bet from 1 to 5 credits is not shown in the display of Figure 4 and the display of Figure 5 can be used for showing the full schedules. Thus, in Figure 5 the payout schedule shown includes five columns 300A to 300E, representing the award amount for each winning combination when 1 to 5 credits, respectively, are bet. In the example, the player pressed the See Pays button 216 when payout schedule 207 was selected after 3 credits had been bet on that schedule. Thus, column 300C (headed "Bet 3") is highlighted (e.g. by appearing brighter on an illuminated display). If the player selects the See Pays button 216 before placing any bets then the payout schedule 201 will be shown initially.

The player can select the amount to be bet on the payout schedule shown (using the buttons 114, 116, 125, 129 as before) and the display (including information areas 120, 122) is updated accordingly, and the

appropriate one of the columns 300A - 300E is highlighted. Pressing the Max Bets All Tables button 125 has the same effect as selecting the Exit button 306 (see below) and immediately dealing the cards.

5 The player can cycle through all fifteen payout schedules using the Previous button 302 and the Next button 304. In the example, pressing the Previous button 302 would show payout schedule 206 instead of 207, whilst pressing the Next button 304 would show payout schedule 208. It will be understood that other ways of selecting (one or more) payout schedules to be displayed can be implemented, e.g. selecting from fifteen icons.

10 The player can press an Exit button 306 to return to the main game display such as the one shown in Figure 4, with any bets that were placed using the "See Pays" display being used in the game.

15 One way in which the player chooses how many credits to bet on a particular payout schedule is similar to the first embodiment of Figure 1. That is, he uses the Select Table button 124 to cycle through the schedules and then selects the amount to be bet on the highlighted schedule using the Bet 1 button 114 or the Max Bet button 116. Another way in which a payout schedule can be selected (particularly if the game is implemented on a personal computer) is to move a pointer to one of the schedules and select it. A Max Bet All Tables
20 button 125 is also included that allows the player to bet the maximum number of credits on all fifteen payout schedules at the press of one button (if he has sufficient credit) and also commences the card dealing. The Bet Schedule headings will be updated whichever way the player selects the amount(s) to be bet.

It will be noted that the payout schedules of Figure 4 include one further row 218 at their bottoms corresponding to a winning combination not included in the version of Figure 1. In the example, the additional combination is "Sevens Or Better", which awards a payout for a hand including a pair of any cards of a higher value than six. It will be understood that the game can be adapted to pay out for other non-standard Poker hands, for all or some of the plurality of payout schedules. Furthermore, as shown in the award amounts for a Royal Flush in the payout schedules 211 - 213, the value of the payouts for winning combinations appearing in a higher row of "higher" (positioned to the right) payout schedules need not increase in a linear manner, or, indeed, increase at all as a rule. It will be appreciated that the amounts in all or some of the payout schedules can be predetermined (e.g. recalled from a store) or may be generated (e.g. in a pseudo-random manner or according to particular algorithms) at the start or during a game.

In the examples above bets are placed on hands of cards and awards are given for combinations that are winning hands according to the rules of Poker. However, it will be appreciated that the principle of having a plurality of selectable payout schedules can be applied to card games other than Poker, and, indeed, non-card games, e.g. fruit/slot machine type games.